DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 308 185 SP 031 296

AUTHOR Evans, Claryce
TITLE The Educators' Forum: Teacher-Initiated Research in Progress.
PUB DATE Mar 89
NOTE 28p.; Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the American Educational Research Association (San Francisco, CA, March 27-31, 1989).
PUB TYPE Speeches/Conference Papers (150) -- Reports - Descriptive (141)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC02 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Action Research; *Classroom Research; *Collegiality; Elementary Secondary Education; Inservice Teacher Education; *Research Methodology; Seminars; *Teacher Participation; Theory Practice Relationship
IDENTIFIERS *Educators Forum

ABSTRACT

The Educators' Forum is a seminar for teachers which supports them as they carry out investigations in their classrooms and schools. The investigations include studies of classroom issues, action research projects, and studies of individual students. Each member of the forum is encouraged to choose a topic of interest or concern which is directly related to his or her classroom work, and to design and carry out an investigation related to that topic. The other participants serve as an advisory board, helping the teacher to: focus on one topic, determine what is already known and what needs to be found out, define a researchable question, select appropriate data collection procedures, carry out the investigation, and make sense of the results. This paper describes, briefly, the structure of the forum and explains its purposes. It reports the results of some typical research endeavors and discusses questions related to the current and future work of the forum. The forum has demonstrated that, in a well-designed seminar, teachers can learn to provide support for each other and that because they voluntarily choose to continue to participate in such a seminar, it is a cost-effective form of professional development and renewal. (JD)

****
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
****

Session 11.10

ED308185

THE EDUCATORS' FORUM: TEACHER-INITIATED RESEARCH IN PROGRESS

CLARYCE EVANS

DUXBURY PUBLIC SCHOOLS
130 ST. GEORGE STREET
DUXBURY, MA 02332

"PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY

C. Evans

TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)."

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
Office of Educational Research and Improvement
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

☐ This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.

☐ Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.

• Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official OERI position or policy.

Paper presented at the annual meeting
American Educational Research Association
San Francisco, CA
March 27-31, 1989

SP031296

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

THE EDUCATORS' FORUM: TEACHER-INITIATED RESEARCH IN PROGRESS

CLARYCE EVANS

MARCH 1989

INTRODUCTION

The Educators' Forum is a seminar for teachers which supports them as they carry out investigations in their classrooms and schools. The investigations include studies of classroom issues, action research projects, and studies of individual students.

The Forum is, itself, a form of action research. As we have developed and conducted the seminar, we have studied it as well. As a result, we are able to answer questions in this paper which we could not have answered when we began the Forum: Is a biweekly seminar sufficient support for teachers to enable them to conduct classroom investigations? Will teachers find classroom research interesting and rewarding? Will teachers overcome their awe of "Research" and "Researchers" and gain enough confidence to write for research meetings and for publication?

The Forum has been successful in providing support for teachers. As a result of that success we have entered, this year, a new phase of our work. We are now confident that this work has the

potential to make an important contribution to the improvement of elementary/secondary education, and have decided to expand the Forum by forming new groups. As we prepare to expand, new questions have been brought to mind, questions which we have begun to refine and address.

In this paper we will: 1) describe, briefly, the structure of the Forum, 2) explain the purposes, 3) report results, 4) discuss questions related to our current and future work, and 5) make a concluding comment.

STRUCTURE

The Educators' Forum is a voluntary seminar open to elementary/secondary teachers in public and private schools. It began in the fall of 1985 and is based on the work of the Teacher-initiated Research Project (Evans, Stubbs, Duckworth, and Davis, 1981). Each member of the Forum is encouraged to choose a topic of interest or concern to her which is directly related to her classroom work, and to design and carry out an investigation related to that topic. The other participants serve as an advisory board, helping her to: focus on one topic, determine what she already knows and what she wants to find out, define a researchable question, select appropriate data collection procedures, carry out the investigation, and make sense of the results.

The Forum meets for two hours biweekly during the school year. At each session three or four participants present their work -- to report on progress, hear reactions from the other members, and plan future steps. Participants are encouraged to write regularly, for themselves as an aid to thinking through their projects, for the other members of the Forum as preparation for presentations of their work, and for their colleagues in education through publication or presentations at professional meetings. Participants rotate responsibility for taking notes at the meetings and for bringing refreshments. All notes and discussions are confidential.

Currently there are fourteen members of the Forum. All are women. They teach in Boston and several suburban school systems, and in one private school. The range of their experience is from that of a first year teacher who joined the Forum while student teaching to that of a career teacher who plans to retire within the next two years. Their teaching assignments are diverse, including: self-contained and team-taught elementary classes, a combination first/second grade class, high school classes for regular students and "at risk" students, a substantially separate special needs class, a resource room for students of moderate special needs, and individual piano lessons for students and adults. Two members are full-time graduate students, not currently teaching. The seminar leader is an administrator in a public school system.

Teachers receive no university credit or stipends for their participation, and they pay no fees.

PURPOSES

The Educators' Forum is designed to contribute to quality education both directly and indirectly. It is designed to affect educational practice directly by helping the participating teachers understand classroom and school issues which are important to them. It is also intended, over a longer period of time, to have an indirect effect on educational practice by influencing educational research.

Our work is based on the assumption that the most valuable resource available in classrooms and schools is the active intelligence of teachers. We assume, futher, that any efforts to promote quality education which attempt to bypass the understanding of teachers will fail. That is, we assume that the quality of education can be improved if we help individual teachers to think more carefully about their teaching, and can not be improved unless we do so.

We note, however, that there are few structures which help teachers to think deeply and clearly about their work. Most teachers are quite isolated in their classrooms; most school faculty meetings are too short and too infrequent to go beyond announcements and administrative issues; conversations in

teachers' rooms and department offices are often repetitive and/or depressing; in most school systems evaluations of teachers are infrequent and superficial; and most professional development opportunities for teachers are designed to convey new ideas and practices rather than to explore the experiences of teachers and the meanings of those experiences. So, one purpose of the Forum is to provide an opportunity for sustained professional dialogue. This dialogue is intended to support the intelligence of teachers, to help them select and think through topics which are important to them.

The second purpose is to encourage teachers to become more confident and active in relation to educational research. The excerpt below from the report of the Teacher-initiated Research Project explains our view of the need for teachers' involvement in educational research.

> The knowledge that teachers have about educational practice, and the enormous potential power of that knowledge to inform practice, is undervalued both by teachers themselves and by the rest of the educational profession. As a result there are too few occasions for teachers to share with each other and make public their deeper understandings of their work. Teachers rarely make these occasions for themselves because they do not consider that what they know has value in this way. Nor does the rest of the educational community encourage them to do so.
>
> The lack of forums in which teachers carry on in-depth professional conversations over long periods of time perpetuates, in turn, the view that teachers' knowledge has little to contribute to further understanding in the field. That is, because teachers most frequently experience their peers either in informal settings or in staff development programs in which their usual role is audience, they have few opportunities to see the more reflective, knowledgeable

side of their colleagues. They conclude, reasonably but erroneously, that teachers as a group are not very impressive. They don't talk seriously to each other and so they don't take themselves seriously as a group. They don't talk seriously to each other because they don't take themselves seriously as a group.

The result is that the profession has not yet acquired a collective body of knowledge based on teachers' contributions.

The other side of devaluing what teachers know is the failure to take seriously what teachers need to know, would like to know, are concerned about, have as questions. Yet these questions are significant in that they grow out of this body of practical knowledge. Again, without forums in which these questions can be clarified and their importance weighed, the questions remain unevaluated and unaddressed. The result is that the profession does not work on the most significant issues -- those which come from teachers' careful consideration of their practice and have the most potential for positive influence on practice.

In brief, nowhere is effort put into systematizing teachers' professional knowledge or contributing to its evolution. Teachers do not take their professional knowledge seriously enough to do it themselves and researchers do not take it seriously enough to devote their resources to doing so.

Not only is teachers' cumulative knowledge undervalued, their central role in the profession is also unacknowledged. Educational practice is what teachers do: students' educational experience is most directly the experience they have with teachers. If research is to affect practice, it must be through what teachers do, how they do it, and what it means to them. It must address their central concerns and must be accessible to them. Yet by and large members of the research community proceed as if their findings can bypass the thoughtful consideration of teachers. Even those researchers whose main interest is the improvement of practice do not consider teachers the primary audience for their work. It is as if they think some intermediary can judge their findings and make decisions of which teachers can then be apprised. The assumption is that teachers can act on the basis of information schematically conveyed to them, without making it a part of their personal knowledge and relating it to their own concerns.

> Teachers for their part are too willing to let this happen. They are too often willing to follow an intermediary's judgment rather than take the responsibility to make their own informed judgments. Many teachers pay no attention to research even in those areas in which that attention would be rewarded. This is largely in response to the fact that research is not written for their consideration. Researchers ignore teachers; teachers ignore researchers right back.
>
> As a result, educational research makes too little contribution to improving teachers' practice.
>
> This separation of those who practice from those who study practice could be diminished from either end. Researchers could take teachers' knowledge seriously, start to help them sort out questions, and then work with them to try to answer those questions. Or, teachers could take their knowledge seriously, try to articulate what they know, find ways to answer what they do not know, and make known to the research community unanswered, well-defined questions which they view as important. The Forum addresses itself to the second of these two possibilities (Evans, Stubbs, Duckworth, and Davis, 1981 pp. 8-9).

RESULTS

Our work with the Forum has established a number of findings which were hoped-for hypotheses when we began. We can now answer the questions posed earlier in this paper: Is a biweekly seminar sufficient support for teachers to enable them to conduct classroom investigations? Will teachers find classroom research interesting and rewarding? Will teachers overcome their awe of research and researchers and gain the confidence to write for research meetings and for publication?

We now know that elementary/secondary teachers are able, with minimal assistance, to design and carry out investigations in their classrooms. The teachers have been supported by the

structure of the Forum and their colleagues in the group. In a few instances they have had assistance from a graduate student or non-teaching member of the Forum. This assistance has consisted of student or classroom observations and, in one case, access to an ERIC search. The teachers have not had any other support. Although we believe their work would be enhanced by more opportunities for classroom observations and other forms of data collection, more encouragement for writing, and the opportunity for an intensive summer seminar, it is clear that work of this type can be carried on successfully at a very low cost or voluntarily, as ours is.

The membership of the Forum from year to year has demonstrated that, given an opportunity, teachers will choose to continue to study their classrooms. Almost all teachers who have joined the Forum have continued to participate in succeeding years. Several have left the group because they moved away, were ill, started a business, or decided to go to graduate school. One of our members now lives in Washington and rejoins us when she is in Boston. Two teachers left for unstated reasons, presumably lack of interest. In some instances people have been "on leave" from the group and have returned. Although one year we arranged for a local college to offer credit for participation in the Forum, only two teachers took advantage of this opportunity. Once they have experienced classroom research, teachers find it interesting

and rewarding; their participation does not require extrinsic rewards.

Observing the teachers in the Forum over time has confirmed one of our original hypothoses -- teachers' lack of time and lack of confidence with respect to research are major factors which make teacher-initiated research difficult. Teachers are already busy, with teaching, with other professional activities, and with their lives. It is hard for them to find time to attend biweekly meetings, think about their projects, keep journals, prepare for presentations to the group, read and prepare to respond thoughtfully to what other members have written, make observations in their classrooms, and keep the records they have decided to keep.

For many teachers, it also takes time and encouragement for them to get past their feelings of "Who me?" in relation to educational research. Even when they see themselves as competent and respected teachers, even when they recognize that reports of their work are of interest to other teachers, they do not necessarily see themselves as sources of knowledge for the field. They have difficulty believing that their investigations are "Research" or that their work and ideas, which they see as specific to their classrooms and to them, will be of interest to the research community. The presence of teachers on the panel today is one indication of their increasing confidence in their

ability to make a contribution beyond their classrooms, a contribution to the knowledge base of the field.

During the first year of the Forum there were few participants who volunteered when we were invited to speak to university classes and fewer who could picture themselves on a panel at the annual meeting of the New England Educational Research Organization. Those who did volunteer, however, were surprised and pleased by the interest in their presentations. During the second year three teachers, including Joan Warner who is here today, joined the two leaders of the Forum in a panel at the annual meeting of the Women and Education SIG. The teachers were delighted with the interest in, and very positive responses to, their work. That experience was energizing for them and has had continuing benefits for the Forum. They now confidently and enthusiastically volunteer to present their work. Their experience and the expressions of interest by members of the Forum serve an important function in encouraging newer members to share their work outside the group.

More members of the group have become more confident about the importance of their work and have made presentations at a Lehman College conference on teacher research, in university courses, at inservice programs in their own and other school systems, and at an open meeting of the Harvard Teachers' Network. They will again this year be on the program of the NEERO conference and a spring meeting of the Harvard Teachers' Network. Although

members are also writing more than they did the first year, to date they have had only two publications (Evans, Stubbs, Frechette, Neely, and Warner, 1987 and Frechette, 1987). We have learned that we will need to provide additional support in order to have their work published. Although additional support for writing will be useful, the essential elements we are currently missing are organized information on possible publishers and more encouragement to submit written pieces.

We should note that we have not found that educational research is too complex for teachers. Even though members are self-selected and have no formal training in research methodology, they are able to devise effective methods for learning more about their classrooms and students. Careful attention and thoughtful comments from their colleagues in response to their writing and oral presentations are essential elements enabling them to think through their questions, to articulate what they know, and to figure out what further information would be useful to them. Those who write regularly for themselves also report that it is an important aid to deepening their understanding of the topics they have chosen to study.

We anticipated, and have found, that most teachers take some time each year before selecting a topic for study. In any classroom at any time there are many interesting and important issues to be addressed. It is not surprising, then, that each teacher usually takes some time to choose just <u>one</u> area for concentration.

There are a few exceptions to this pattern. Some teachers have come to the group with a project already in mind or in progress, and some have started up quickly in the fall when they have continued their studies from one year to the next.

We did not anticipate that it would be as difficult for teachers to sustain a focus as we have found it to be. Too many unexpected things happen in classrooms and schools. There are too many stresses which are distracting. An urban high school teacher began to plan a case study of a student in her resource room because he -- even more than her other students -- appeared to have little attachment to the school. Her plans were interrupted when the student dropped out of school. A first year teacher selected a topic of interest and prepared to present it to the group but, like many first year teachers, began to have discipline problems in her classroom which require her attention.

Sometimes, however, a "distraction" becomes a useful topic of study. A teacher who was new to the Forum assumed she would choose an appropriately "grandiose" topic but was distracted by a particular student in her room. At several meetings she presented descriptions of the student's behavior and her concerns, explaining each time that she was just reporting on him until she selected her "topic." She then realized that he <u>was</u> her topic, continued to write about him, arranged to have someone

observe him in her class and other classes, and later published a case study of him (Frechette, 1987).

It is interesting that the minimal assistance provided by the Forum is sufficient to enable teachers to overcome the difficulties, distractions, and time constraints to sustain this work. With so few structures available to encourage and support teachers in sustained study of their own work, it is not surprising that so few of them choose to do so. Most do not think of it as a possibility. Even if they were to attempt it, it is unlikely that many would find it possible, individually, to sustain the focus required to contribute to the study of education.

QUESTIONS RELATED TO CURRENT AND FUTURE WORK

We began the Forum with a set of guidelines designed to assure that our meetings would be productive. We understood that defining and carrying out classroom investigations would be difficult. It would be important that our seminar discussions be focused and non-repetitive and we wanted to avoid the complaining-without-intent-to-act tone which is typical of many lunchroom conversations in teachers' rooms. We also understood that teachers would take risks in presenting their investigations to the other participants in the seminar. In their presentations they would necessarily expose information about their teaching and their thinking about their teaching. And, they would be

talking about precisely those topics which they had identified as most important to them. Our goal, therefore, was to produce a safe environment in which which we could do difficult, quite personal work. Having a set of guidelines has contributed to our success in doing that. The guidelines have been reviewed, and sometimes revised, each fall. Our current set is listed below, with a notation after each to indicate whether it was part of the original set or was added in one of the annual reviews.

1) We seek to help each other obtain more information about our own classrooms, to better understand our classrooms. We do not attempt to suggest better teaching strategies to each other (original).

2) When a teacher presents her work for discussion, we respond to her by trying to see the questions and issues from her point of view, and by helping her figure out what she wants to understand not what we find most interesting or important (original).

3) We try to learn something, to answer some questions about our classrooms. In other words, we are task oriented (added).

4) Each participant is asked to avoid extended discussions of issues or problems over which she has no control or influence (original).

5) Written notes of each session are distributed to all participants and the tape recordings made of each session are available to any participant on request (original).

6) Because teaching is personal and members of the group talk about some issues which are worrisome, discussions of the group and documents prepared in connection with it are confidential (original).

7) The "subjects" of the investigations are recognized as people too; they are respected and not treated as objects (original).

8) Each participant has "air time" on a regular basis. That is, all members have the opportunity to have the

support of the group, our time is not monopolized by a subgroup (added).

Despite the high level of functioning of the group, however, we are currently undertaking a reconsideration of our guidelines. There are three interrelated reasons for this. 1) In the last two years the nature of the studies being done by teachers has changed. 2) As we plan for expansion to new groups, we believe we may be able to provide a more useful set of guidelines based on our current functioning. 3) One of our central guidelines has not been incorporated into the culture of the group as the others have.

Nature of the Teachers' Projects

We began the Forum with a clear orientation toward individual classroom investigations. We stated explicitly that the purpose of the Forum was to help each teacher define and carry out such an investigation, and that the purpose of the group was to serve as an advisory board to help each participant do so. We did not assume that teachers would carry on investigations which involved other teachers in their schools or that they would deliberately change their teaching practices -- only that they would study them. In the last two years several teachers have designed and carried out projects which go beyond those we originally envisioned. They have carried out action-research projects or projects which involve other teachers; and their studies have

been extended beyond their individual classrooms. The three examples below are illustrative.

1) S.P., a teacher in a suburban elementary school, designed, implemented, and evaluated an action-research project on conflict resolution in her second grade classroom. She began her study by monitoring the natural problem solving styles of her students. She then implemented a model in which children were able to develop conflict management skills. S.P. documented the evolution of this model over a two-year period. She studied the responses of the first and second year groups and documented contrasts and consistencies between them.

Throughout the two years, S.P. documented the successes and failures of the program. In particular, she observed times when children used their conflict resolution skills, and times when they did not. With support from her school system she then then wrote a paper for other teachers in the system explaining how this model could be implemented in their classrooms. Her paper has now become the basis for one of the units in the second grade social studies curriculum in her school district.

2) J.E., who is here today, is a special needs teacher in a suburban elementary school. She designed and implemented a school-wide early intervention program. J.E. had worked in the school for several years and had observed that each year there were several first grade students who experienced failure. Her goal was to design a program which would provide a comfortable and confident start in school for all children -- "zero failure" in first grade. The program she designed starts on the third day of school, requires no testing or parental permission, and serves all students identified by the first grade teachers as "at risk." The program provides support for first grade students in reading and language arts before they experience failure.

The program is staffed by regular, special needs, and remedial reading teachers, and by parent volunteers who have been trained by J.E. The program was evaluated at the end of the first year by comparing the results of the pilot year with those of previous years. The comparisons included test scores, the number of special needs referrals, retentions, and the incidence of behavior problems occurring as a secondary response to school anxiety or failure. The program was very successful the

first year and is being continued. It is now being considered for system-wide adoption.

3) B.T., who is also here today, is an English teacher in a large urban high school. Her project developed out of her search for a way to understand adolescents better and to teach them more effectively. From her previous experience she knew that her students' interest in learning about themselves could be used to stimulate their interest in learning about literature. Her own interest in human development had led her to Erik Erikson's writings on adolescents, which she found interesting and useful. Combining these ideas, she decided to use Erikson's theory of the life cycle as a structure for selecting and teaching a series of stories which would allow students to gain insight into their own lives.

She designed a course which included four elements: the selected stories, class discussions, student journals, and student autobiographies. Having taught and revised the course, B.T. was interested in studying it, both to refine it further and to learn about its impact on the students. She wondered: What stories had the most impact on the students? What did students learn from each of the stories? What aspects of the course were most interesting to students? Were the effects of the course different depending upon the different ethnic backgrounds of the students? She decided these questions would be answered best through student interviews conducted by an outside interviewer. She arranged, therefore, to have a graduate student conduct the interviews. She learned that her students had a strong interest in the theory of the life cycle, and she plans to include more reading and discussion of it next year. She also will strengthen the visual component of the course by using films and asking students to prepare posters to illustrate the life cycle. Her school system now provides funding for other teachers who want to use the course in their classrooms.

Because these projects are more ambitious than those we originally had in mind, we are now rethinking our procedures and guidelines. Does our current mode of operation provide sufficient support to teachers as their studies move beyond their classrooms? Will a change in structure be needed and will the support of the Forum be sufficient for participants carrying out

projects which require that they gain approval from administrators and/or mobilize other staff members in their schools and school systems?

Current Functioning

Discussions in the Forum are much more productive than they were during the first year. The difference is visible to us, though not carefully documented, and visible to visitors and potential members. Teachers who are thinking of joining the Forum are invited to attend two or more sessions to see whether the group meets their interests and needs. During the first year several teachers attended the Forum for one or more sessions and decided not to join. We now find that new members and visitors have the same responses -- this is a wonderfully impressive group -- and that almost all potential members decide to join. We have developed a culture in the group which is more productive and positive than was described in the initial guidelines. We recognize that our discussions are now guided by a set of unstated, implicit guidelines as well as by the written ones. We believe we will be able to make the implicit guidelines explicit and that they will provide valuable guidance to new groups.

Focus on Research, not Teaching

As stated earlier, with one exception the guidelines have been incorporated into the culture of the group. We find we no longer need to remind ourselves to observe them. The exception is the

first -- "we do not attempt to suggest better teaching strategies to each other." Though the group began with the explicit understanding that our purpose was to support classroom investigations, and not to provide teaching tips for improved instruction, this has not become a part of the culture of the group. This leads us to reconsider the guideline.

Taking the Next Steps

In reconsidering our guidelines we are rethinking the first of them and documenting and discussing our current implicit guidelines.

In rethinking the first we have asked ourselves why it was originally included and whether it should be modified or dropped. In retrospect, the guideline was included for four reasons:

1) We believe there are many different ways to be a good teacher, and that what is good teaching is best defined within a context. We did not want to define some particular set of "enlightened" classroom practices and persuade and "train" teachers to carry them out.

2) We wanted to support the teachers' confidence in themselves as knowledgeable experts about education. We did not assume or want others to assume that our purpose was to "improve" them. We chose to view the participating teachers as colleagues, not as "students" or "clients." We assumed that they knew as much about teaching as we did, and that they certainly knew more about their own classrooms.

3) We wanted to avoid repetitive, unpleasant, unsupportive discussions in which the teachers argued with each other about what someone in the group "should" do in her classroom.

4) We wanted to involve teachers in research and, thereby, to broaden the definition of educational research.

It is now clear that the first three conditions can be sustained within the group without adherence to this particular guideline. In all their interactions, the group members are sensitive to one another and display their mutual respect. Their responses to each person as she presents her work to the group take into consideration what she is trying to do, her concerns, and her setting. Their comments are thoughtful, not facile.

We have also returned to the experience with the Teacher-initiated Research Project to rethink our earlier work. We learned there that it is not always sensible to differentiate between investigation -- learning more about some aspect of one's classroom -- and improving one's teaching (Evans, Stubbs, Duckworth, and Davis, 1981 pp. 76, 78). This is one good reason it is hard to maintain a "strictly research" orientation. An intervention designed by the teacher to gather more information may lead to better teaching or learning; and an intervention designed to improve teaching/learning may lead to improved understanding of the classroom. Two examples are illustrative.

A middle school teacher who was interested in finding out why a group of female students took so little interest in his class (which they demonstrated by coming to class without their books, failing to do their homework, and choosing not to participate in class discussions) talked with them about his interest in this

question and arranged to have them interviewed several times regarding their views of the school, his class, and their other classes. As the girls began to be interested in the fact that he was interested in their views, they began to report to him in informal conversations their ideas, interests in and out of school, and incidents in their lives. Later they began to bring their books to class, to do their homework, and to participate in class discussions. So, the design of his investigation led to more effective teaching. On the other hand, S.P., as mentioned earlier, set out to improve the climate in her room, established a problem-solving club to do that, and in the process learned, or relearned, something about her teaching -- that her modeling was an essential element in the development of the problem-solving skills of her students.

The question is still open, shall we continue to state explicitly that we focus exclusively on investigations or shall we include problem solving/direct improvement of instruction in our joint agenda?

In trying to make our implicit guidelines explicit, we are documenting and analyzing our "natural" responses in the group. In doing that we have become aware that when a teacher is under some stress in relation to the topic she is presenting, she is likely to want, and members of the group are inclined to provide, ideas for improving the situation quite quickly, ideas for decreasing the level of tension, rather than ideas for developing

a better understanding of the situation. We have also identified several types of typical responses -- as listed below.

1) Probe to enable the presenter to recognize and state all she knows about her classroom in relation to the question she is studying. Often she has a lot of important information which she does not know she has.

2) Ask the presenter to state, again, what she would like to know that she does not yet know.

3) Ask questions which will lead her, when she returns to her classroom, to notice things she has not previously noticed.

4) Describe a similar situation from one's own teaching experience.

5) In response to expressed concerns or problems, suggest solutions.

6) Suggest ways to gather more information.

7) Point out progress -- you are much more articulate in talking about this than you were at the beginning of the year; your question has evolved since you first presented it, initially you were asking what connections students were making with the content of the curriculum, now you have answered that and are asking a deeper version of the question.

8) Validate the presenter and/or her choice of topic -- this is important in a lot of classrooms; you handled that parent conference very well; I'm impressed by how carefully you have thought this out; your written description of this is very clear.

9) Ask the presenter to state or help her to figure out what her next step will be.

10) Ask the presenter what type of response from the group would be most helpful to her and suggest some possibilities if she does not yet know.

11) Suggest ways a concern or interest can be turned into a question which can be answered by classroom observations or record keeping.

12) Interpret the information which has been presented -- it sounds like you have an hypothesis that your students would learn better if you used tradebooks all the time.

13) Express outrage or sympathy with the teacher when she is in a difficult situation or has been treated unfairly by someone in her school.

14) Suggest data which would be useful to gather -- if I were studying this student I'd want to know if he does this in all his classes.

15) Clarify something which is unclear or ask for additional information in order to better understand the situation.

16) Express a concern in one's own classroom or school about the same or similar issue.

17) Ask questions which encourage the person to think more deeply.

We have also begun to notice patterns in the different contributions that different people make to the group. Some people have "characteristic responses." They make comments of various types, but also make some types of responses quite frequently. At least one person in the group will, if no one else has, check with the presenter to see if the direction the discussion is taking is the direction she would like. Another often provides quite specific positive feedback. The leader often asks the presenter, toward the close of the discussion, if she has already determined the next steps in her study.

It is quite exciting to us that we are able, simultaneously, to assist one another with individual projects and study our own behaviors. Within a few moments we are able to go from

responding to a presentation to discussing our responses and back again to discussing the presentation.

Quite recently a graduate student has selected the Forum for an ethnographic study. She will use the tape recordings of the sessions to provide a transcript of each of the sessions. It may be possible for her, through teacher interviews, to provide additional information which will assist us in reformulating our guidelines. We would like to ask the participants, individually, their perceptions of their own implicit guidelines for discussions. In addition, we would like to ask what they have noticed about what types of responses are most helpful to each of them. We anticipate that their answers will vary.

In the past we have asked participants to respond to a short open ended questionnaire each spring. We have asked: 1) Why I come, 2) What I've learned from being a member, 3) Ways my teaching has changed, 4) What makes it work, and 5) What could we do to improve it? The results of those questionnaires have been gratifying and informative, but we believe that more focused questions in an interview will provide more useful information.

CONCLUDING COMMENT

Teaching is demanding work. There are, inevitably, in every classroom, situations which are confusing to the teacher and situations which produce emotional strain for the teacher. Even

good teachers can not, over time, continue to do their best work without appropriate support to think clearly about the confusing situations which arise and to handle effectively the emotional strains. We have demonstrated that in a well designed seminar they can learn to provide such support to each other. Because teachers will voluntarily choose to continue to participate in such a seminar, it is a cost-effective form of professional development and renewal.

In addition, as teachers participate in such a seminar, they make explicit the important knowledge they have of students, teaching, learning, and classrooms. This has the potential to make an enormous contribution to our understanding of education.

A group of teachers in Chicago have decided to become affiliated with the Educators' Forum and form the second seminar. We invite you to form other groups and join us in this work.

Evans, Claryce, Margaret Stubbs, Eleanor Duckworth, and Christine Davis. Teacher-initiated Research: Professional Development for Teachers and a Method for Defining Research Based on Practice. Cambridge, MA: Technical Education Research Centers, 1981.

Evans, Claryce, Margaret Stubbs, Phyllis Frechette, Claire Neely, and Joan Warner. Educational Practitioners: Absent Voices in the Building of Educational Theory. Wellesley, MA: Wellesley College Center for Research on Women, 1987.

Frechette, Phyllis. "Learning to Observe Joshua" in Pathways Volume 4, Number 1, October 1987.